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Cuba Conflict . . . By Chalmers M. Roberts

No 'Soft' U. S. Policy

On New Year's Day it will be four years since Fidel Castro swept into Havana to complete his conquest of Cuba.

Few, if any, then anticipated that the fate of that island 90 miles from the United States would become a touchstone not only of American policy in this hemisphere but of the larger East-West conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Today, as the anniversary nears, that conflict remains. And Castro's Cuba remains Communist. It is not a member of the Warsaw Pact, a military alliance, but Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev has said he will not abandon it. Nor has there been any change in Castro's vow to use Cuba as a base to Castroize all of Latin America.

In recent weeks, since Khrushchev pulled his missiles and bombers out of Cuba, the conflict between Washington and Havana has appeared to abate. In fact, this was because President Kennedy through his brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, sought to win freedom for the men who were captured in the Bay of Pigs fiasco of April, 1961.

Whether the United States should have paid this ransom will be a matter of debate and disagreement for a long time. Even if the U. S. Government did not directly put any cash into the ransom, the Government was the driving force in the whole affair. Be-



Roberts

sides, it supplied certain logistic support and the private contributors who put up the food, medicine and medical supplies will have part of the cost written off their Federal tax bills.

The ransom deal now is a fact. Perhaps, too, some or all of the 20 or 23 Americans Castro holds will be freed. If so, that may mean more ransom. Whatever the niceties of the whole deal, the U. S. Government ransomed the men who have gone or will go free.

Once the prisoner ransom affair is ended, and that should be soon, U. S.-Cuban relations will revert to the status quo ante. That is, they will revert to the period of open hostility and lack of diplomatic and other relations which existed prior to Khrushchev's missile-planting attempt.

At that time the United States was preparing to tighten the economic squeeze on Castro with new trade regulations. These were held up while the naval blockade was enforced during the crisis with Moscow, but President Kennedy has said a revamped set of regulations will be put into effect.

These have been held up during the ransom affair and will not be promulgated until that is cleaned up. But officials here say they will be issued in due course and they emphasize that the United States is not about to embark on any new "soft" policy toward Castro.

Castro remains a thorn in the American side. Castroism has had a black eye in Latin America but it is still active and still has strong supporters in too many na-

tions. It may be costing Khrushchev \$1 million a day, as Washington figures it, to support Castro economically but there is no sign Khrushchev will quit paying the bill.

Before the Hungarian revolt it was firmly believed in the West that once a Communist regime, with its military and police state apparatus, had been in power a while it could not be overthrown. Hungary, however, showed that such a regime could fall if enough of the military became disenchanted.

In the case of Hungary, Russian tanks quickly rumbled in from the neighboring Soviet Union to put down the revolt. They could not get to Cuba the same way, however. But as of today a lot of Russian troops remain in Cuba; and Washington has suspected they were sent there, at least in part, to prevent internal action against the Castro regime.

The Bay of Pigs prisoners, now free, may be talking about a new assault on Cuba. From every indication, that sort of thing is out. Nor is any direct U. S. military action likely unless Castro starts shooting down American reconnaissance planes—a possibility, of course.

So the problem of removing Castro becomes the problem of the anti-Castro underground in Cuba, whatever its strength today, plus the undercover resources of the United States. On this latter front, including possible subversion of Castro's armed forces, things were just beginning to stir at the time of Soviet missile discovery.